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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MK](#) [GR](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: GOVERNMENT COMMITTED TO NIMETZ PROCESS

REF: A. SKOPJE 880

[1](#)B. SKOPJE 941

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4(B) & (D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The GOM's meeting with UN Special Envoy Nimetz on December 3 was positive, with the Macedonian team proposing substantive changes to the latter's framework proposal (ref A) and underscoring its commitment to remaining engaged in the Nimetz process. The GOM made it clear to Nimetz, and in an earlier meeting between FM Milososki and FM Bakoyannis, that the threat of a veto of Macedonia's NATO membership bid, or an actual veto, could destabilize the country at a time when Kosovo status developments will require maximum regional stability. Nimetz has proposed bilateral discussions on the matter in early January in both Skopje and Athens; the Macedonians are willing to meet in Athens if the Greeks decline to travel north. The Ambassador has urged the GOM to stay engaged in the Nimetz process and to avoid actions that could provoke Athens. She encouraged FM Milososki to sustain momentum on completing NATO tasks so that Macedonia meets NATO's performance-based standards, strengthening its case -- and ours -- for an invitation on the basis of its individual achievements. End summary.

COMMITTED TO ENGAGEMENT IN THE NIMETZ PROCESS

[1](#)2. (U) FM Milososki briefed the Ambassador December 4 on the high-level government meeting the previous day with UN Special Envoy Nimetz. Present on the Macedonian side during the meeting with Nimetz were President Crvenkovski, PM Gruevski, Ambassador Dimitrov (Macedonia's name negotiator), and the PM's Chief of Staff.

[1](#)3. (C) Milososki said the meeting had taken place in a "good atmosphere," characterized by a broad exchange of views and government proposals for "upgrading" or modifying Nimetz's "framework" proposal (ref A). The government team had emphasized its commitment to staying engaged in the process. The Macedonian side also had asked Nimetz to take into account the "changed circumstances" since the name dispute began in 1993. Milososki recapped four points the GOM team had made to Nimetz in arguing their position:

--given the regional context (e.g., Kosovo status developments) it would not be prudent to "weaken Macedonia"

by pressuring it on the name issue in advance of the NATO summit;

--unlike the situation in 1993, when only a handful of states had recognized Macedonia by its constitutional name, over 120 countries had now done so, creating new facts on the ground;

--it was not productive to try to drive the process toward resolution with deadlines; both parties should continue to engage in the Nimetz process; in the meantime, Skopje wanted "more intensive contacts" with Athens, including at the ministerial level, to discuss the way forward; and

--Macedonia was intent on moving ahead with the proposed commission on textbooks, for both countries.

STAY THE COURSE, AVOID PROVOCATIONS, FOCUS ON COMPLETING NATO TASKS

¶4. (C) The Ambassador said the GOM reaction to the Nimetz visit had been a "step in the right direction." It was important to sustain the government's engagement in the Nimetz process. The GOM had responded quickly and properly to two developments the previous week regarding the use of the name in customs documents and on license plates (ref B). It would be important to avoid similar situations that could be perceived on the Greek side as provocations, and to help us make the case that Macedonia was committed to "good neighborly relations" with its southern neighbor. In the meantime, the government should continue to focus on sustaining the momentum on completing NATO tasks (ref B) to ensure a final decision on membership for Macedonia would be performance-based. She also advised Milososki to begin looking "beyond April" toward actions that could help

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facilitate eventual ratification by NATO members of a possible membership invitation.

NEXT BILATERAL MEETINGS IN SKOPJE AND/OR ATHENS?

¶5. (C) Earlier in the day, Ambassador Dimitrov told us that Nimetz had floated the idea of two bilateral negotiation meetings on the name issue to be held in early January in Skopje and Athens, with the foreign ministers of both countries attending and giving opening remarks before turning the process over to their respective negotiating teams. Milososki said the GOM had invited the Greeks to Skopje, but added that the Macedonia side would be willing to travel to Athens for talks if that seemed preferable to the Greek side.

MILOSOSKI-BAKOYANNIS MEETING IN MADRID: THE DAMAGE A VETO COULD DO

¶6. (C) Milososki said he met briefly with FM Bakoyannis on the margins of the OSCE Ministerial in Madrid the previous week for a "friendly" exchange of positions. Milososki said he had told Bakoyannis that a Greek veto of Macedonia's NATO membership based on failure to resolve the name issue before the Bucharest Summit would: 1.) fail to resolve the name issue and render the 1995 Interim Accord invalid, which would be worse for everyone and would make resolution of the matter less rather than more likely; 2.) negatively affect Greece's image in NATO; and 3.) increase the risk for Greece of instability in its northern neighbor at exactly the same time as Kosovo status developments required regional stability.

¶7. (C) FM Bakoyannis's response, Milososki said, appeared more "rhetorically resolute" than he thought the Greeks actually are regarding the threat of a veto. He said he had been taken aback at her suggestion that "we could resolve this issue in 24 hours," adding that he did not expect the two sides could achieve dramatic progress on the issue before April 2008.

COMMENT

18. (C) The GOM's response to the Nimetz visit was more constructive and nuanced than PM Gruevski's initial rejectionist reflex when Nimetz first put forward his framework proposal (ref A). The GOM clearly is neither willing nor able (given strong national public sentiment) to make any concessions that would involve a change in Macedonia's constitutional name. Pressure to arrive at a solution to the name issue by April 2008 would be soundly rejected by the public and all political parties, regardless of ideological or ethnic stripe. A strong positive, however, is Macedonia's clear commitment to a reinvigorated Nimetz UN process. Looking beyond a hoped-for NATO invitation in 2008, the Ambassador has begun to highlight to the GOM that if a NATO invitation is secured, actual membership will require national ratifications. This, in turn, will realistically require a solution to the name issue. Getting to a solution will be a slow and difficult process. We strongly believe, however, that success in earning a NATO invitation stands a chance of improving the atmosphere so that the UN process ultimately can succeed. Efforts between now and next April to improve relations between Greece and Macedonia, including direct work between both sides on sensitive matters, such as history textbooks, can build a basis of trust to resolve the name issue in time.

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